



The Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (TJMDR)

Content Available at www.saap.org.in

ISSN: 2583-0317



A Study on the Causes of Separate State Demand in Tripura

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Received: 02 Jan 2023 Revised: 14 Jan 2023 Accepted: 25 Feb 2024

Abstract

This article explores the socio-political dynamics and historical context leading to the demand for a separate state of Tipraland within Tripura, India, focusing on the indigenous Tipra peoples' aspirations for autonomy and cultural preservation. Originating from the establishment of the Indigenous People's Front of Twipra (IPFT) in 2009, the demand for Tipraland reflects a culmination of historical grievances, including the failure of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) to meet the indigenous community's needs, demographic shifts due to refugee influx from neighboring Bangladesh, and the erosion of indigenous cultural and linguistic identity. The article analyzes how these factors have contributed to a sense of alienation and marginalization among the Tipra people, further fueled by land alienation, linguistic hegemony, and political underrepresentation. It discusses the recent political developments under the leadership of Maharaja Prodyot Kishore Manikya and the formation of the TIPRA Motha party, highlighting their significant role in revitalizing the demand for a more inclusive Greater Tipraland. The study concludes with recommendations for the Government of India to address the complex interplay of refugee integration, indigenous rights, and regional autonomy to ensure the socio-political and economic wellbeing of the indigenous populations within a cohesive national framework. Through this analysis, the article contributes to the broader discourse on indigenous rights, migration, and state formation in northeast India, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies that recognize the unique challenges and aspirations of indigenous communities.

Keywords: Greater Tipraland, Indigenous, Tripura, Refugee, Migration, Tipra.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37022/tjmdr.v4i1.564>

Produced and Published by

South Asian Academic Publications

Introduction

The indigenous peoples of Tripura are demanding for a separate state within Tripura. Tripura is one of the states in India's north-eastern region. The Indian state of Tripura is the third smallest state in India. Bangladesh and Tripura have an international boundary of 856 square kilometres, and Bangladesh surrounds Tripura on the east, north, and south. Refugees from the neighbouring nation of Bangladesh have had a substantial impact on Tripura. As a result of a massive influx of Bangladeshi refugees, Tripura has become one of the states in India where the indigenous population has been reduced to a minority [1]. According to the 2011 Indian government census report, the indigenous population of Tripura is only 31.80

percent, while Bangladeshi immigrants make up 68.80 percent of the state population. Socially, politically, and culturally, the indigenous population has been reduced to a micro-scopic minority. The influx of refugees from the former East Pakistanis and present-day Bangladeshis into Tripura has become a recurrent concern for the international border State of Tripura, which was a princely before its merger with the Indian Union on October 15, 1949 [2].

Since the 1950s, the rate of population growth in Tripura has been tremendous. Population growth throughout time has contributed to a multitude of social issues, particularly for indigenous peoples. It has been observed that the rapid population growth produced by mass immigration altered the ecological, geographical, economic, social, religious, cultural, and political components of Tiprasociety. The indigenous people of Tripura called themselves as Tipra. Population growth in Tripura has been so astounding that in the decade following the partition of the Indian, the area experienced a twentyfold increase. This abnormally high population growth is not attributable to birth, death rate, etc., but rather to a massive influx of refugees from the former East Pakistan and present-day Bangladesh [3].

This also resulted in large variances in the proportion of the state's indigenous people to its total

population. From 1947 to 1971, an estimated total of 6,09,998 undocumented immigrants entered the country, according to estimates. In addition, a total of 5,87,754 migrants from the former East Pakistan were documented in 1961. According to the 1971 Census, there were 6,20,847 Bangladeshi immigrants. This record listed above were simply the officially registered refugees who were afterwards rehabilitated in different sections of the State. After that, there was a constant stream of Bangladeshis, and the Tripura government has been unable to record and register them because they entered the state illegally.

Massive alienation of indigenous lands, political situation due to mass inflow of non-indigenous peoples, caused unrest among the indigenous, which led to the formation of a militant group as well as an organisation to raise the voice of the natives. In the name of progress, there were also development initiatives in indigenous territories that displaced thousands of indigenous peoples. This damaged the socioeconomic and cultural life of the indigenous peoples, resulting in poverty and identity loss. In the case of forest areas and territories, native people were further perplexed; despite having lived there for generations, forest officials inform them that they were living unlawfully. After joining the union of India, the new administration in Tripura dissolved the tribal reserve regions, overturned the rules of the former rulers, and enacted the "Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960" which was regarded as a black day for the Tipra Indigenous peoples. Later as there was several protest and movement made by the indigenous Tipra peoples of Tripura on the abolition of the tribal reserved areas made by the king, the Act of 1960 was amended in 1975 for the protection and restoration of the indigenous people land. The indigenous king of Tripura left aside vast territories for the inhabitants to inhabit and cultivate. The Tripura administration has failed to comprehend this, and state authorities are more concerned with rehabilitating refugees than empowering indigenous peoples. Further, when TLR and LR Act 1960 (Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reform) was passed, there was no recognition and no provision for the indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples demanded the inclusion of the protection of indigenous peoples' lands, sought the intervention of the Central Government and urged the government to take adequate measures for the protection, restoration, and development of indigenous Tipra peoples' lands. Section 187 was inserted to the TLR and LR Act, 1960 as a result of the popular movement and leadership that demanded revisions to the land law in the context of indigenous people. There were further manipulations by people in positions of authority, despite the fact that this statute and Act were intended to preserve native from land alienation and restoration. Instead of safeguarding the territory of indigenous peoples, the government acted against their best interests. Positive steps have not been taken so far but it has tacitly allowed the government or private person to acquire the indigenous people land more easily

with the permission from the Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) [4].

As a result of refugee rehabilitation, the percentage and number of refugees within years has increased to a distressing degree from the perspective of indigenous peoples in Tripura, which has been affected by huge land alienation of indigenous territory. This mismatch in the rehabilitation process has reduced the number of indigenous peoples, who are now a minority community in their own state. It has been observed that a large refugee influx has occurred from the neighbouring country East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, between 15 August 1947 and 24 March 1971, a total of 6,09,998 refugees entered and were officially resettled during 24 years, from 15 August 1947 to 24 March 1971 [5].

Theoretical Framework

To understand the complexities surrounding the demand for a separate state in Tripura, it is essential to incorporate a theoretical framework that encompasses the concepts of ethno-nationalism, minority rights, and social identity theory. This framework helps in analysing the motivations behind the separate state movement and the dynamics of cultural and political assertion by indigenous communities within the context of a multi-ethnic society.

Ethno-nationalism offers a lens to examine how ethnic groups with distinct languages, cultures, and historical identities may develop a collective desire for political autonomy or independence to preserve their unique identity. In the context of Tripura, ethno-nationalism can be seen in the indigenous communities' demand for "Greater Tipraland," driven by a desire to safeguard their cultural heritage, language, and land rights from the overwhelming influence of Bengali-speaking immigrants.

The concept of minority rights, including the right to self-determination, cultural preservation, and non-discrimination, provides a foundation to understand the grievances of the indigenous peoples of Tripura. This framework highlights the international and national legal mechanisms aimed at protecting the rights of minorities and indigenous populations. The demand for a separate state is a call for the recognition and enforcement of these rights, aiming to rectify the perceived injustices and inequalities faced by the indigenous communities.

Social identity theory explains how individuals derive their identity and self-esteem from the groups to which they belong, and how intergroup dynamics, such as discrimination and competition for resources, can exacerbate group conflicts. Applying this theory to the situation in Tripura reveals how demographic changes and the influx of refugees have intensified competition for resources, leading to increased intergroup tension and reinforcing the indigenous communities' identification with their ethnic group as a means of asserting their rights and preserving their identity.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of the separate state demand in Tripura. Ethno-nationalism explains the

underlying motivations for political autonomy; minority rights offer a legal and ethical basis for these demands; and social identity theory elucidates the psychological and social processes driving the movement. Together, these theories highlight the complex interplay between identity, rights, and socio-political dynamics in the region.

Objective

1. To find out the causes of separate state demand.
2. To find out the present status of separate state demand.
3. To know the role of leadership in separate state demand.

Research Methodology

This research paper has employed a combination of primary and secondary sources to gather information and provide a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter. The use of empirical methodologies, such as scientific observation and expert interviews, adds credibility and depth to the research. By incorporating qualitative data and employing critical analysis, the study aims to offer a just and well-rounded conclusion.

The emphasis on empiricism, observation, critical analysis, and exploratory methodologies reflects a rigorous and thorough approach to understanding the topic. These methodologies allow for the examination of facts, relationships, and contextual factors that contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues faced by the indigenous peoples of Tripura. The inclusion of new, rational, and empirically supported information in the research paper contributes to the existing body of literature on this subject. By utilizing various approaches and sources of information, the paper aims to provide a nuanced perspective and shed light on the complexities surrounding the indigenous population's challenges in Tripura.

Research methodology combines qualitative data, critical analysis, and empirical approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

Results and Discussion

Tripura is situated between 22°56' and 24°32' north latitude and 91°09' and 92°21' east longitude. It has a surface area of 10,486 square kilometres, a maximum length of 183.5 kilometres, and a maximum width of 112.5 kilometres (Bera, 2012). Tripura is a landlocked state bounded on its north, south, and west by Bangladesh. The length of its international border with Bangladesh accounts for around 84% of its overall border, while its borders with Assam and Mizoram span 53 and 109 kilometres, respectively. Only National Highway 8 connect hills to Cachar District in Assam with Tripura. Next to Assam, Tripura has the second highest population density among the north-eastern states. Over sixty percent of the land is designated as forest, leaving only about twenty-seven percent for cultivation. The former princely state

joined the Indian Union as a Group C Category state on October 15, 1949. Tripura became a Union Territory on July 1, 1963. Tripura became an official state on January 21, 1972. The state has 8 districts and Autonomous District Council. After the 2011 decadal census, the four districts were reorganised into eight districts in January 2012. The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) was established in 1982 under the Constitution's Seventh Schedule, which was subsequently transferred to the Sixth Schedule in 1985. TTAADC area is mostly inhabited by indigenous Tipra peoples. The TTAADC encompasses almost two-thirds of the state's total area. It encompasses the major districts and contains one-third of the state's population.

Origin of separate state demand

Demand for a separate state of Tipraland with the areas of TTAADC (Tripura tribal Area Autonomous District Council) was proposed by IPFT in 2009. From 2007-2009, Narendra Debbarma author of the book, "Tiprani Laibuma" has spoken with 102 Tipra people in regards to separate state for the indigenous people of Tripura. One of the persons he meets during this period was Padma Shri Awardee Late N. C Debbarma. Narendra Debbarma and N.C Debbarma along with several others like minded peoples form a regional party called IPFT (Indigenous People's Front of Twipra) to lead a movement for separate Tipraland in 2009.

The movement of Tipraland did not happen suddenly. Although, it is a recent development, it is a manifested in the separatist movement launched by the insurgent groups and anti-refugee and foreigners' agitation by some Tipra based political parties. When the insurgency had been crushed down and anti-refugee and foreigners' movement failed to produce the desired political outcome, Tipra leaders like Narendra Debbarma realised that Bengalis could not be ousted out from Tripura. Therefore, formation of a separate Tipraland with the existing the geographical areas of TTAADC became preeminent for the survival of the Tipra and other tribal communities.

A large section of Tipra people in Tripura feel that the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous Council (TTAADC) has failed to address the problems and fulfil the aspirations of the indigenous Tipra people. With the limited powers entrusted upon TTAADC, the present TTAADC is unable to safeguard the political, economic and cultural interest of the indigenous Tipra peoples. In the overall context of ethnic relations, the Tipra people still maintain fear of domination with continuous increase in non-tribal population in the state and even within TTAADC area. Inner line permit has not been introduced to pre-empt and contain settlement of non-tribal population in TTAADC. Therefore, a section of the indigenous Tipra leadership argues that unless a separate state for the tribal is carved out with the existing TTAADC areas, the future of the indigenous Tipra people will continue to remain in danger [6].

Article 2 and 3 of the Indian Constitution addresses the process of formation of new states. Many new states have been formed to address similar burring problems. According to IPFT, as there is a constitutional scope for formation of new state, a separate land for the indigenous peoples is feasible. It organised mammoth public gatherings in the recent past in support of separate Tipraland. The party formed a coalition government with BJP with two cabinet ministers. Although, BJP state unit does not support for Tipraland. But after joining the government with BJP, there is a decline in the demand of Tipraland, as being in government IPFT party were uable to do any protest or roadblocks for the demand of Tipraland. Hence, the Indigenous Tiprapeople start looking for new political platform for demanding separate state Tipraland for the Indigenous Tipra peoples.

Influx of refugees to tripura

In 1941 there was communal riot in Rajpura (Dhaka) which resulted in huge number of Hindu Refugees taking refuge in Tripura. The king of Tripura gave shelter to the refugees in Arundhutinagar, Agartala. Again on Direct Action Day 16th August 1946 there was communal riot between the Hindus and Muslim in Noakhali and Comilla. They also resulted in huge number of refugees taking shelter in Tripura. In this connotation the Communist Party of India form a relief committee to send to Tripura and help the refugees. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee sent a medical mission to Tripura to cater the refugee. Gandhiji visited Noakhali district in November 1946, some young Congress leader from Tripura went to meet with him and give him the report on the situation of Tripura due to the refugees (Tripura, 1970). Tripura shares a 856 sq. km long border with East Pakistan. Precisely, four District of East Pakistan share boundary line with Tripura, i.e. Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla and Sylhet. Tripura share 83 percent of the total boarder area with East Pakistan and only 17 percent with rest of India. In 1946-1947 the boundary line between East Pakistan and Tripura is just imaginary line draw by Lord Cyril Radcliffe. The boundary line remind unguarded till 1980. Communal riot took place in most of the district of East Pakistan after partition of India till the end of 1930s. From 1950 to 1958 huge influx of Hindus Refugees came to Tripura. Although, Nehru-Liaquat Pact of 1950 agreed to give back the property to the refugees if they return. But most of the Hindu refugee does not go back to East Pakistan [7]

Causes of separate state demand

Based on an extensive research encompassing a diverse range of respondents, it is evident that there is a widespread agreement regarding the primary causes driving the social movement for a separate state in Tripura. The survey results shed light on the multitude of factors that contribute to the mounting demand for a separate state, reflecting the grievances and concerns of the indigenous peoples residing in Tripura. Foremost among these factors is the demographic change

experienced by the indigenous population, which has transitioned from being the majority to becoming a minority. This shift in population dynamics is seen as a significant impetus for the social movement, as respondent's express apprehension regarding the preservation of their cultural identity and the potential diminishment of their political representation in the face of such demographic transformations.

Another crucial aspect that emerges from the research findings is the issue of land alienation resulting from the resettlement of refugees from erstwhile Pakistan and Bangladesh. Indigenous peoples have been displaced and dispossessed of their ancestral lands, leading to profound concerns among the respondents. The perceived injustices and imbalances stemming from this land alienation contribute significantly to the demand for a separate state, as the indigenous population seeks to address these issues.

Linguistic hegemony represents yet another crucial cause propelling the social movement. Respondents highlight the dominance of the refugee language over Kokborok, the indigenous language of Tripura. Furthermore, the non-recognition of Kokborok as the first language of Tripura exacerbates linguistic disparities faced by the indigenous population. Respondents argue that this imposition of the refugee language poses a direct threat to their linguistic and cultural heritage, thus reinforcing the urgency of their demand for a separate state.

Political deprivation is identified as a consequential factor driving the social movement, with respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the limited number of reserved seats for indigenous peoples in the Tripura Assembly. The perceived underrepresentation of the indigenous population in political decision-making processes contributes to their marginalization and strengthens the demand for a separate state. Respondents assert that greater political autonomy is necessary to address their concerns and safeguard their rights effectively.

The educational landscape and its impact on the indigenous population are also prominently cited by respondents. The prevalence of government-run schools offering instruction in the Bengali medium poses significant challenges for indigenous students, denying them the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue. This educational hegemony is viewed as a barrier to equal educational opportunities and hampers the cultural and linguistic development of indigenous communities, thereby fueling the momentum behind the social movement.

Additionally, the imposition of the Bengali script for writing Kokborok instead of using the traditional Roman script is identified by the majority of respondents as a significant cause driving the demand for a separate state. This imposition is perceived as a direct assault on the indigenous language and its distinct cultural identity, further intensifying the determination of those advocating for the social movement.

Respondents also express discontent with the performance of the Autonomous District Council (ADC). The perceived failure of the ADC to fulfil aspirations and bring about significant development for the indigenous peoples of Tripura is considered a major contributing factor to the demand for a separate state. This perceived lack of progress and inability to address indigenous needs undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the ADC, thereby strengthening the resolve of those supporting the social movement.

Furthermore, the fact that the regional party advocating for a separate state holds power in the ADC is viewed as a crucial indication of indigenous support and progress towards realizing their aspirations. This political alignment resonates with the aspirations of the indigenous peoples and bolsters their belief in the potential achievement of a separate state.

Finally, respondents overwhelmingly agree on the need for the Indian government to establish comprehensive refugee laws. They argue that such laws would ensure the equitable distribution of refugees and prevent the disproportionate settlement of large numbers in smaller states like Tripura. This concern arises from the potential demographic imbalances that can arise when a substantial refugee come in large numbers.

Present status of separate state demand and its leadership

Leadership plays important role in the success of any moment. One of the charismatic and able leaders among the indigenous people is Maharaja Prodyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, he is well respected and supported by the indigenous peoples of Tripura. Maharaja Prodyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, the Royal Scion, grandson of the last Maharaja of Tripura. On 5th Feb 2021, he announced his new political party's TIPRA MOTHHA with a political demand of Separate state called, 'Greater Tipraland', which include the areas of existing TTAADC areas plus areas inhabited by Tipra people within Tripura,

The main reason why Maharaja Prodyot resign from the post of Congress State President is due to congress leadership telling him to withdraw his case on NRC in Supreme Court and telling him not to protest against CAA. As large numbers of congress supporters in Tripura are against NRC. Hence, he chose to form his own new Regional political party TIPRA. He has managed to merge most of the indigenous based regional party like INPT, TSP, and IPFT Tipraha.

The newly form political party has manage to defeat BJP and its alliance partners in TTAADC elections 2021. TIPRA has won 16 out of 28 seat in TTAADC. At present TTAADC is under the control of newly formed political party called TIPRA, where most of the indigenous based political party has merge for the demand of Greater Tipraland. TTAADC Election Results shows that TIPRA MOTHHA (Tipra Alliance) got 46.73 % (3,42,819 voter),

NDA (BJP Alliance) got 29.34 % (2,15,303 voter), Left Front

These election outcomes demonstrate significant support for TIPRA and its vision of Greater Tipraland among the electorate, reflecting the aspirations of the indigenous communities in Tripura. In 2023 Tripura Assembly Election TipraMotha has done tremendous work and has come out as the main opposition party in Tripura with 13 MLA's. With 2 years it has gone from strength to strength gaining support for Greater Tipraland from the indigenous peoples of Tripura. On 2nd March 2024 TipraMotha has also sign an tripartite agreement with Government of India, Tripura State government and TipraMotha Party. The Agreement gives special focus on resolving issues pertaining to history, land rights, political rights, economic development, identity, culture and language of the indigenous Tipra people.

Conclusion

Tripura being a small state has absorbed more refugees more than its capacity. Influx of Refugee poses great pressure on the limited resources available in Tripura. The indigenous peoples feel the risk in protecting its land, culture and identity. Hence a demand like Greater Tipraland has comes up in a small like Tripura. There is a underlying fear among the Tiprasa people they will be deprived of development and of their right unless they get political power in their hand. This political power is only possible by creating a separate state only for the Tiprasa peoples. Government of India should frame policies where the indigenous peoples don't feel neglected and discriminated. In the absence of a specific statute, India, which is home to a significant number of refugees, is unable to provide them with adequate support and safeguard their rights. The government must enact a non-discriminatory statute specifically for refugees to establish a standard and equitable process when dealing with refugees.

Long inhabited by refugees from neighbouring countries, Northeast India necessitates the government's efficient execution of refugee policy and special attention. In addition, denying asylum to migrants in need is not a solution to the massive influx caused over the years and cannot be used to jeopardise their lives or liberty. At the same time, government should be careful about the host state and the indigenous peoples. Large-scale refugee settlement has a massive impact on the identity and culture of the Indigenous peoples.

Conflict of Interest and Funding

The authors affirm hew have no known financial or interpersonal conflicts that would have appeared to have an impact on the research presented in this study.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge my Guide Dr. Joanna Pereira Coelho for her support and guidance.

Informed Consent, Ethical Statement & Author Contribution

Yes

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